



MARY LOU DICKERSON

State Representative • 36th Legislative District



2000 Legislative Report

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Dear Friends,

As the Legislature's work nears completion, I wanted to report on key issues I'm often asked about.

I also want to thank everyone for the great response to my legislative survey. Fully 1555 local residents took the time to respond, and nearly half of these added written comments. It took me a while, but I read every note. Unfortunately, legal mailing restrictions prevented me from answering everyone who responded to the survey, but you'll see the results summarized on the back page.

Consumer privacy became such a huge public concern this session that I'm devoting the major focus of this newsletter to it. I worked with Attorney General Christine Gregoire on this issue, and I was shocked by the obscenely widespread invasion — and sale — of personal financial, medical, insurance, phone, shopping and other records. I suspect you'll be shocked too.

This newsletter also briefly describes several new laws we've enacted this session. If you have any insights you'd like to share on these issues, or any others, please remember you can always reach me quickly through the addresses and phone numbers on this page.

It is an honor to serve you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mary Lou Dickerson
Mary Lou

MARY LOU DICKERSON

Stop selling our privacy!

Your privacy is under attack by telemarketers, junk-mailers and other snoops who are making fortunes by buying and selling your credit card numbers, bank balances, phone records, shopping records, medical and insurance records, entertainment preferences, and much else.

These invasions are more than abstract violations of your right to privacy. In one recent case, a California bank sold 3.7 million credit card numbers to a convicted felon, who promptly rang up \$45 million of charges on unsuspecting customers. **We also found cases of:**

- **Banks identifying cancer victims and then recalling their loans;**
- **Stalkers tracking down women through Internet sales of private addresses;**
- **Senior citizens targeted for scams after their financial records were 'profiled.'**

To make matters worse, a new federal policy allows mergers between banks, insurers, and other financial services — *including tax-preparation services* — with very few privacy protections. Consumer groups warn this policy will invite new credit scorecards that merge your health and loan repayment records.

Facts like these show why I sponsored legislation to require banks, insurers and other financial services to *get your written permission* before selling or sharing your personal information for a purpose you didn't request.

My proposal would also require financial businesses to clearly notify you of their privacy policies and your rights, and would ensure your right to review and correct data that could be shared. I also supported Attorney General

Gregoire's separate proposal to require *all* businesses to respect your right to say "No" to information sharing.

The response to these proposals was amazing. Consumer advocates ranging from the AARP and Consumers Union to the conservative Eagle Forum and Christian Coalition strongly endorsed my proposal (see the related box). The Attorney General's proposal also received broad support.

But later, in the words of *Seattle PI* writer Solveig Torvik, "like a plague of rapacious locusts, lobbyists representing businesses that stealthily gather, then sell, dossiers on you descended on Olympia." Unfortunately, the lobbyists won the first round. Despite wide bipartisan support, both privacy measures were blocked in the House without a vote being allowed.

For the next several months I'll focus on sharing what I've learned about the seriousness of new threats to your privacy. If you'd like me to speak about this important issue to a group you belong to, please let me know. Be assured, the fight for your right to privacy is just beginning.

Recent Internet prices for your personal information

Social security number:	\$49
Cellular phone sheets:	\$159
Unlisted phone number:	\$95
Bank account balance:	\$45
Bank activity detail:	\$89*

**All deposits, withdrawals, checks*

The Consumer Financial Privacy Act I sponsored earned broad support, including:

- AARP
- ACLU
- Bruce Reeves, Pres, Senior Lobby
- Christian Coalition of Washington
- Consumer Action
- Consumer Federation
- Consumers Union
- Eagle Forum
- Junkbusters, Inc.
- National Org. for Women, WA
- Northwest Women's Law Center
- Privacy Rights Clearinghouse
- WASH-PIRG
- Washington Women United



I worked closely with Attorney General Christine Gregoire to protect consumer privacy.

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Highlights from my work for you this year

Many of the proposals I joined in sponsoring on behalf of our district and state enjoyed good success this year. It is important to remember that Democrats and Republicans worked *together* to produce these victories. The bipartisan spirit shown on most key issues made this the most productive short session I can remember.

■ Lottery for better schools

I sponsored a bill to dedicate about \$520 million of lottery profits over five years to a new Better Schools Fund. These are important new education dollars, not a replacement for current funding, and local schools would decide how the money is used. As I write this, the Senate has not yet agreed to this proposal.

■ Patients' Bill of Rights

We finally enacted the strong Patients' Bill of Rights I've supported for many years. Doctors *and* consumers demanded these protections against unjustified denials of care or patient wishes. The new law ensures your right to choose your doctor, have reasonable access to specialists, appeal denials of care, keep medical records private, and sue when unfair insurance decisions cause injury or death. I sponsored the House version of the Senate bill that became law.

■ The Worker Retraining and Tax Fairness Act

This historic unemployment insurance reform was an important victory for struggling families as well as employers. It will help some 20,000 dislocated aerospace, timber and other workers to receive training in new job-skills while saving Washington businesses about \$575 million in reduced unemployment-insurance taxes over the next six years.

■ Senior-citizen tax relief

Because soaring Seattle home values have created severe property-tax problems for many retirees, I sponsored proposals to provide between \$200 and \$500 of property-tax relief to seniors (depending on income) *without shifting tax-burdens to anyone else*. Many people with disabilities would also qualify. The Senate has not yet acted on this measure.

■ Reducing domestic violence

Lax domestic-violence enforcement is one reason why 32% of victims are re-victimized within six months. I'm proud that improvements to domestic-violence fatality reviews which I sponsored became law. We also



strengthened domestic-violence penalties, education and prevention measures, with more support for victims — and we required *automatic* arrest when a police officer has probable cause to believe a court order on domestic violence has been violated.

■ Foster kids

Too many foster kids are repeatedly moved from home to home and place to place, with little chance for the stability kids need to thrive. One foster child in our state had 29 different homes, 20 different schools, 19 therapists and seven caseworkers before she turned 18. I proposed a study to compare our foster-placement system with the best practices of other states. Better legislative funding is surely part of the solution, but we also need a clearer understanding of how placement decisions are being made.

This issue has taken on even greater importance because a new class-action lawsuit argues that repeated moves have subjected Washington's foster kids to unnecessary emotional trauma. I'm pleased to report that both the House and Senate budgets include my proposed study.

■ Government Reform

We lose millions and millions of tax-dollars each year because too many state contracts are poorly written or inadequately monitored. Whistle-blower investigations have found widespread abuses, including double- and even triple-billing and payments for work never performed.

To reduce this waste and increase government accountability, I proposed reforms that will require strict contract guidelines, training in contracting for *all* state agencies, and *mandatory* random performance audits. With the help of Helen Sommers and key Republicans, these reforms are in all proposed budgets.

What did you say?

The great response to my legislative survey was very helpful in guiding my work for our communities this year. I thought you'd like to know how 36th District residents responded to the survey. Here is a summary (I've shortened some questions to save space).

Should we use some of our state's unrestricted reserves to provide a short-term fix for important state and local services that lost funding due to I-695?

Yes — 72% No — 23% Don't know — 5%

Should we also use some of our state's emergency reserves to provide a short-term fix for important state and local services that lost funding due to I-695?

Yes — 41% No — 50% Don't know — 9%

Washington's ferry system faces a \$281 million shortfall due to I-695. Some lawmakers suggest turning the ferry system over to the private sector. What do you think?

Privatize the ferry system — 23%

Continue to regard ferries as part of the highway system — 42%

Keep ferries in the highway system, but increase fares — 35%

*What do you **most** want to protect from budget reductions due to I-695?*

The *overwhelming* top answer was K-12 education, followed in order by health care, transportation, social services, environmental protection, senior services, higher education, criminal justice, economic development.

How should we use the money we will get during the next two years from the tobacco company court settlement?

Use all of it to fund anti-smoking efforts — 6%

Use for anti-smoking and health care needs — 60%

Use it for any state funding need — 34%